

Friday's Feature
By
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Here's what can be done to repair a storm damaged landscape

The forces of nature can be extraordinarily powerful and terribly destructive. Hurricane Dennis dealt a mighty blow to Northwest Florida's already weakened landscapes. It will be very important that hurricane damaged plants be cared for as soon as possible.

Cleanup is the first priority. It's important to remove fallen leaves, branches and other debris as quickly as possible. This will not only benefit your lawn but allow you to better evaluate the condition of your shrubs and trees.

Sadly, a large fallen tree is a loss cause as a general rule. However, there's a good chance that small young trees and shrubs will survive if you can reset them quickly. If you are unable to immediately reset the fallen plant, protect their root system from drying out. Place soil, moist burlap sacks or moist sphagnum moss on the exposed roots until they can be reset.

Once reset, trees should be held in position with stakes or guy wires. Trees with trunk diameters less than two inches can usually be anchored by two or three 48-inch, 2-by-2 inch wooden stakes. Place the stakes about a foot outside the root ball and insert them at least 18 inches into the soil. Secure the stake to the trunk with ties made from wide, smooth material or hose-covered twine. Trees two inches or larger in diameter should be guyed with three or four cables. Be sure to mark the support guys with bright materials to prevent accidents. Adjust the guys several times during the growing season so that girdling and injury to the trunk is minimized. All support stakes and guys should be removed after one year.

Broken and torn limbs will affect the shape as well as the general health of a plant. It's best to properly prune the plant to avoid additional damage. Always make clean, even cuts. Where possible, cut branches back to major limbs or the main trunk, cutting just outside of the branch collar.

Large branches that are too heavy to hold while cutting require three separate cuts to prevent bark stripping. Make the first cut on the lower side of the branch away from the trunk and one third of the way through the branch. Make the second cut downward through the limb from the top, starting about one inch beyond the first cut. The weight of the branch may cause it to snap off before the cut is complete. The remaining stub is easily supported with one hand while you cut it from the tree, again ensuring that it is cut outside the branch collar.

The old recommendation was to paint wounds to protect the cut surface from

wood-rotting organisms and cracking upon drying. Research has shown, however, that wound dressings do not prevent decay.

Where bark injury has occurred, cut away ragged edges to make a clean, smooth wound. It is not necessary to paint the wound with a wound dressing.

In cases where all branches have been destroyed, it may be wise to remove the entire plant especially trees such as pine, which do not normally regain their natural form. With other trees such as oaks, where strong bottom limbs still exist, it may be wise to keep the tree. However, emerging sprouts from the ends of large, cut limbs will be poorly secured to the tree and are likely to fall from the tree during a future storm.

Tip of the Week: All plants that have been exposed to salt water should be irrigated with fresh water as soon as possible. Apply more water, and water more frequently than under normal conditions.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names in this article is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.